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Francis Poulenc's *Stabat Mater*

by

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## Introduction

Francis Poulenc once remarked “if people are still interested in my choral music fifty years from now it’ll be more in the *Stabat Mater* than the *Mouvements perpétuels*” (Audel 56, 1978). It is precisely fifty years since Francis Poulenc created his *Stabat Mater*, and indeed people are “still interested.” Speaking more generally about his entire sacred output Poulenc claims, “I’ve put the best and most genuine part of myself into it” (Audel 56, 1978). Further, in a letter to Darius Milhaud written on March 6, 1951, Poulenc writes, “I am keeping this work a secret so as to see all their faces when they hear these 45 minutes of choir and full orchestra, which Bernac considers my best work” (Buckland 1991, 188). The fact that Poulenc himself and his closest friends place this work in high regard attests to the quality of this piece.

The purpose of this paper is to provide history and background, as well as examine specific musical details which are particular to Poulenc’s *Stabat Mater* and his compositional style. In addition, it will comment on the relationship of this work to previous settings of the same text, as well as its placement within Poulenc’s compositional output, particularly within context of his sacred choral music.

## Biographical Details and the Placement of the *Stabat Mater* within Poulenc’s Compositional Career

Francis Jean Marcel Poulenc was born on January 7, 1899 in Paris. Poulenc inherited varying traits and values from his mother and father. His mother, Jenny Royer Poulenc, came from a family of Parisian craftsmen. She was a well-educated, sophisticated Parisian woman, who was also very skilled as a



pianist. It was with his mother that Poulenc's musical training began at age five. Poulenc's Catholic faith was instilled in him by his father, Emile Poulenc, who was brought up in a deeply religious Catholic family. One of Poulenc's great-uncles was a "curé" (parish priest). Emile was also well-educated, and the Poulenc family was substantially wealthy. Francis' grandfather founded a pharmaceutical company, which is still in existence today under the name Rhône-Poulenc (Keck 1990, 4). Largely due to this family wealth, Poulenc was educated at very fine schools. This privileged environment provided the means for him to attend various concerts, and his upper-class lifestyle exposed him to painting and poetry. Poulenc claims to have been passionately fond of painting since his early childhood. Moreover, he cites two artists who inspired his religious music - Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) and Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664) (Audić 1978, 58). Mantegna was an Italian painter who was a precursor of the Renaissance style, and Zurbarán was a Spanish painter known for his simple naturalism.

Poulenc's early exposure to music most definitely influenced him as a composer. He knew a lot of contemporary music even before his teenage years. He ardently adored Debussy's music, and became exposed to Stravinsky's as early as age eleven, and immediately began to idolize him. Stravinsky's influence on Poulenc can never be underestimated. In 1913, he was able to attend a performance of *Le Sacre du printemps* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Poulenc was fascinated. He once stated: "Well, if Stravinsky had never existed, would I have written music? Which means to say that I consider myself as a son... a spiritual son of Stravinsky" (Audić 1978, 135).

In 1917, Poulenc was introduced to the Spanish pianist Ricardo Viñes. With Viñes, Poulenc continued his piano instruction, and he also began his formal





compositional training. Viñes had a profound influence on young Poulenc. He helped form his musical taste and critical judgement, and it was through Viñes that Poulenc came to know Eric Satie and George Auric (Keck 1990, 4). Together with Auric, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Louis Durey, and Germaine Tailleferre, Poulenc was a member of a union of six composers known as *Les Six*. This collective title gained these composers great publicity and attention.

Poulenc's compositional style became established early in his career, and it changed only minimally throughout his lifetime - "instead of dropping one style in favor of another, he simply added the new techniques to his vocabulary" (Daniel 1982, 94). His early style "was formed under the influence of Satie and other members of *Les Six* who professed antagonism to Romanticism and Impressionism and sought simplicity, clarity, and brevity of expression in music" (Keck 1990, 8). Yet, even though the members of *Les Six* shared a close friendship and the same cultural heritage, individuality was still very apparent in their compositional styles.

At age eighteen, Poulenc was faced with the death of his father. Poulenc's father was the one who continuously worked on instilling the Catholic faith in his son, and Poulenc received very little spiritual encouragement from his mother. In 1917, at this trying stage in his life, Poulenc neglected his faith.

After serving in the military from 1918-1921, Poulenc continued his formal compositional training with Charles Koechlin until 1924. Poulenc considered Koechlin to be the best teacher of counterpoint in France at that time. Ironically, however, counterpoint was not a particular interest and strength for Poulenc. Poulenc explains:



the most wonderful thing about him [Koechlin] was the way he adapted to the pupil. Having felt, as a result, that like most Latins I was more of a harmonist than a contrapuntist, he made me write four-part realizations of Bach chorale themes as well as the usual counterpoint exercises. This work fascinated me and had a decisive influence on me. It was thanks to this that I acquired a feeling for choral music. (Audel 1978, 35)

In the 1920s, Poulenc's music gained more wide-spread popularity, extending beyond the borders of Paris. This is attributed to the increase in success of his compositions as well as his more extensive travelling, including trips to Austria and Italy. On these journeys he met composers such as Berg, Webern, and Schoenberg in Vienna, and Casella in Italy.

Two incidents in the mid-1930s greatly influenced Poulenc and his subsequent compositional output. In 1935, Poulenc was re-introduced to baritone Pierre Bernac. Poulenc and Bernac shared a very close friendship, and Poulenc consequently composed many songs for Bernac. As Bernac's accompanist, Poulenc and Bernac toured extensively in Europe and eventually visited the United States for the first time in 1948.

The second incident of the 1930s which had a tremendous impact on Poulenc was the sudden death of his close friend, composer and critic, Pierre-Octave Ferroud on August 17, 1936. At the time when Poulenc received news of Ferroud's gruesome death in an automobile accident, he was in Uzerche, near the shrine of Rocamadour. According to Hell:

this news made such a deep impression that he immediately set out on a pilgrimage to the nearby Sanctuary of Rocamadour, 'perilously situated alongside a winding road' ... 'and inspiring in those who have been privileged to visit it a feeling of unbelievable peace.' Here he was struck by 'the humble chapel cut out of the rocky mountainside, the courtyard surrounded by pink laurel trees, and inside, the wonderful Virgin carved out of black wood, the work of Saint Amadour. The evening of this visit, he began the *Litanies*



*à la Vierge Noire*, the score of which is dated August 22-29, 1936.  
(Hell 1959, 45-46)

This event undoubtedly reawakened Poulenc's Catholic faith, which had lain dormant since 1917. Prior to the *Litanies*, Poulenc had not composed any sacred music.

All of Poulenc's sacred choral music dates after 1936, but he began his secular choral output as early as 1922, when he wrote the satirical *Chanson à boire*, for a *cappella* male chorus. One other choral work that immediately precedes the *Litanies*, is *Sept Chansons* for mixed chorus *a cappella*. This composition truly reveals Poulenc's surreal style. It is interesting to juxtapose the *Sept Chansons* and the *Litanies* and to observe how profoundly different they are. The *Litanies* have a sincere, devotional tone. Harmonically and texturally they are simpler and more predictable than the *Sept Chansons*, which contain a great amount of chromaticism, ninth and thirteenth chords, rhythmic vitality and unpredictability, as well as polytonality. The works were written merely months apart; however, it was Poulenc's reawakened faith which apparently contributed to this great dissimilarity.

In 1937, Poulenc once again wrote two choral works, one of which was sacred and the other secular: his one and only *Mass* (in G major), for mixed choir *a cappella*, and a cantata for mixed chorus and orchestra, entitled *Sécheresses*. These two choral works are at even further ends of the spectrum than the previous two pieces. *Sécheresses* is violent, harsh and angular, and it is not surprising that the audience at the première performance found the work completely "bewildering." Poulenc alluded "that he may have denied his own nature in a desire to please Edward James [commissioner]" (Mellers 1993, 79).





Poulenc's *Mass* in G major was his first choral work with a purely liturgical text. Masses in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were often restrained and liturgically suitable. Theatrical elements and the use of instruments were consequently omitted. This trend in liturgical composition had been brought about by the *Motu proprio* issued by Pope Pius X in 1903. Moreover, in 1922 the Society of St. Gregory of America issued a list of compositions which were not in accordance with this edict. Whether or not Poulenc's *Mass* was influenced by *Motu proprio*, and whether or not he intended this *Mass* to be functional within the Roman Catholic Church is difficult to verify. The fact that it is *a cappella* and confined in length supports the *Motu proprio*; however, Poulenc omitted setting the Credo, the central tenet of Christianity. Moreover, the *Mass* contains profuse dissonance, and its modulations are ambitious and frequent. It is more likely that *a cappella* choral writing which favoured clarity, brevity, and elegance was at the heart of Poulenc's style at the time, and the *Motu proprio* was not of paramount concern for him.

Poulenc wrote numerous other choral works prior to the *Stabat Mater*. They include his *Quatre Motets pour un temps de pénitence* (1939), *Exultate Deo* and *Salve Regina* in 1941, *Figure humaine* (1943), *Un Soir de neige* (1944), and *Chansons françaises* (1945-46). Of these six works, the first three listed are sacred and the latter three are secular. *Figure humaine* is Poulenc's most substantial and significant *a cappella* work. The very emotional text of this work was written by famous poet Paul Eluard at the time of the Second World War. The piece is scored for double mixed chorus, with six voice parts in each choir. The choral work that immediately precedes the *Stabat Mater* is the *Quatres*



*petites prières de Saint François d'Assise* (1948), and the choral composition that immediately follows it is the *Quatre Motets pour le temps de Noël* (1951-52).

Besides choral music, the compositions that occupied Poulenc in the years immediately prior to the *Stabat Mater* include two substantial song cycles, *Calligrammes* (1948) and *La Fraîcheur et le feu* (1950), a *Cello Sonata* (1948), a *Mazurka* (1949) for voice and piano, and a *Piano Concerto* (1949). The only purely symphonic work of this period is *Sinfonietta* (1947). Considering that Poulenc's last works date to 1962, the *Stabat Mater* was thus written just two years prior to the final decade of his compositional career. Poulenc often said, "my music is my portrait" (Daniel 1982, 99). His increased maturity and learnedness become more evident in his later compositions; yet, never did he lose his comfortable, easygoing spirit.

### **Conception of the *Stabat Mater***

Just as the *Litanies* were composed upon the death of close friend Pierre-Octave Ferroud, the *Stabat Mater* shares a similar conception, in that it was specifically written to commemorate the death of another of Poulenc's dear friends, Christian Bérard. Poulenc truly cherished his many close friendships. Written at the very beginning of this score is: "à la mémoire de Christian Bérard pour confier son âme à Notre-Dame de Rocamadour[.] Francis Poulenc" (Poulenc 1951), which translates, [to the memory of Christian Bérard, to entrust his soul to Notre-Dame de Rocamadour]. Bérard was artistic in numerous ways - as a painter, interior designer, stage designer, and a fashion designer for women. Upon his sudden death in February, 1949, Poulenc began contemplating the genesis of a work to celebrate the memory of Bérard. Once again, he considered



it unsuitable to compose a Requiem. Robertson further indicates that Poulenc “felt unequal to dealing with the Day of Judgement” (Robertson 1968, 147). Consequently he “chose the more personal, intimate text of the *Stabat Mater* and reinterpreted the poem in a way that related to Bérard’s own values as a painter” (Nichols 1993, 7). Bérard’s art was not influenced by the *avant-garde* movement which surrounded him. Rather, his art is described as being “romantic, decadent and extravagant...while his technique was classic” (Nichols 1993, 7). These artistic characteristics are most evident in Poulenc’s arrangement of this grief-stricken text. For example, the beautiful lyricism and sensitivity in the *Stabat Mater* is reflective of romanticism, and the frequent appearance of an *a cappella* choral texture is strongly akin to the classicism and traditionalism of Bérard’s art. In a letter Poulenc wrote to Marguerite Long he said, “I am writing a *Stabat* [Mater] for choir and orchestra. I feel very much at home with it, and I hope I can touch those who like prayers” (Dunoyer 1993, 130).

The *Stabat Mater* was Poulenc’s first sacred choral work with orchestra. He composed it in merely two months, during the summer of 1950. Poulenc had two homes, one in Paris and one in Le Grand Coteau, at Noizay in Touraine. Here, Poulenc “sought his ideal mode of life, ‘une solitude coupée des visites d’amis’” (Gowers et al. 1986, 200). Poulenc found it very difficult to work while in Paris, and did most of his composing while residing at his second home at Noizay, in the Loire Valley. He would rise early in the morning and compose until noon (Keck 1990, 7).

In a letter to Bernac dated August 19, 1950, Poulenc writes: “The *Stabat* is going at such a rate that there can only be a Rocamadour miracle behind it. Out





of twelve sections, three are already done, two almost done, and one sketched in rough - and all this in ten days!" In October, Poulenc wrote to Bernac:

The *Stabat* is finished, finished! [This does not however mean orchestrated as well]. I have just copied it all out, but the ten days of 'no man's land' were indispensable. My nerves were so frayed by the end of it that I wondered if I wasn't deluding myself as to its merits. However, a cool assessment of it this morning has convinced me that it is good, because it is profoundly authentic. (Buckland 1991, 381&187)

### The Original Score and Holograph Copies

From the letters cited above, as well as other supporting literature, it can be determined that the piano-vocal score was also completed in 1950. In its entirety, including all orchestration, the *Stabat Mater* was finished and consequently signed on April 22, 1951. Since a holograph copy exists, there are no problems concerning a fully authoritative score. The work was first published in Paris by Salabert.

Poulenc also distributed four signed copies of the piano-vocal score to various close friends. The first of these autographed copies is currently in Paris in the private library of Hervé Bonnasse. Bonnasse inherited it from Simone Girard, who was a friend of Pierre Bernac's, and who through Bernac came to know Poulenc. On her copy, Poulenc wrote the following dedication, "To the valiant, the faithful, the affectionate, the tenacious, the heroic Simone Girard, with my loving friendship and my blessings, Dom Francesco, Avignon, 11 November 1951" (Buckland 1991, 304-305). A second copy was given to Darius Milhaud, a third to the French teacher and conductor, Nadia Boulanger, and the fourth piano-vocal score was given to Madame Merckling-Schaffner. Schaffner's copy was bestowed on her as a souvenir following the first Paris performance of the *Stabat*



*Mater*, which took place on April 30, 1952. It is signed by Geneviève Moizan, the soprano soloist for this performance as well as the world première in 1951. This copy is currently in Boston, Massachusetts, in the private library of James David Christie. One signed copy of the full score was given to the Russian composer and conductor, Igor Markevich. This copy now resides in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Dept. de la Musique, in Paris (Schmidt 1995, 409).

### First Performances

In November of 1950, Poulenc played the *Stabat Mater* for the British Broadcasting Corp., in London. "According to Edward Lockspeiser's memorandum of 20 Nov. 1950: 'The work lasts about 35 minutes and left the impression from this performance on the piano of being a little bitty'" (Schmidt 1995, 409). Poulenc makes reference to the first public performance in his March 6, 1951 letter to Milhaud: "...I am staying in Paris for the whole of April to finish orchestrating my *Stabat*, which will be performed in Strasbourg on 19 June ... I have chosen the Saint-Guillaume choir, the Strasbourg Orchestra and Fritz Münch; they are already working in an atmosphere of faith..." (Buckland 1991, 188). The first public performance actually took place even sooner than anticipated, on June 13, 1951 in Strasbourg. This performance was part of the Strasbourg Festival. It featured Geneviève Moizan as the soprano soloist, les Chœurs de Saint-Guillaume, Orchestre Municipal de Strasbourg, with Fritz Münch conducting (for an advertisement of this performance see Appendix A).

The American première took place on April 27, 1952 in New York City's Carnegie Hall. Robert Shaw conducted the Collegiate Chorale, the Robert Shaw Chorale and the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra. No sources mention who the



soprano soloist was for this performance. Just three days later, the first performance in Paris took place at Église Saint-Roch. (Schmidt 1995, 410). On January 12, 1953, the New York Music Critics' Circle named the *Stabat Mater* the best choral composition of 1952 (Buckland 1991, 385).

### The Text of the *Stabat Mater*

The authorship of the *Stabat mater dolorosa* text is an issue which scholars have found nearly impossible to fully determine. In James Mearns' article in the *Dictionary of Hymnology*, Pope Innocent III (d. 1216) and Jacopone da Todi (d. 1306) are considered to be the two most probable authors. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* supports the belief that the text is of 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan origin, but it is "unlikely" that the author is Jacopone (Caldwell 1980, 36). In *Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire*, Ron Jeffers, suggests that since "certain of the expressions in stanzas vi-ix of the *dolorosa* have been thought to refer to the Stigmatisation of St. Francis of Assisi," the text must have been written by a Franciscan. This observation makes it impossible to attribute the original text to Pope Innocent III, since he died in 1216, and "the date commonly assigned to the conferring of the Stigmas on St. Francis is Sept. 15, 1224" (Jeffers 1988, 204). Franz Joseph Mone, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century liturgical scholar believes that the most logical assumption is that Pope Innocent III wrote the original form, and Jacopone likely made additions and alterations. Regardless of who the original author was, it is quite safe to conclude that this very emotional poem was written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and popularized soon thereafter, especially in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when the Flagellants would sing on their way from town to town (Mearns 1985, 1082).





In early church manuscripts, there existed long melodic passages which recurred in many different contexts: sometimes as a passage in a regular liturgical chant, sometimes included in a separate collection, and in both situations sometimes with words and sometimes without (Grout 1988, 68). Several of these melodic passages were eventually attached to the Alleluia in the Liturgy. However, as they became more elaborate and extensive, they were separated from the Alleluia and became chants called “sequences.” The *Stabat Mater* gradually found its way into the Roman Catholic Rite as a sequence in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. “The plainsong melody assigned to the sequence (Liber usualis, p.1634v) appears to be of the same date, although its melodic elements can be found in earlier sequences” (Caldwell 1980, 36). Like other sequences, it has the rhyme scheme of *aab aab*. Each strophe of the text is immediately followed by another with exactly the same number of syllables and the same pattern of accents (Grout 1988, 71).

Early on, several sequences were detached from liturgical chants, and thus they began to flourish as an independent compositional form, often with secular content and for secular use. Likely, this increased element of secularization, as well as more elaborate sequence settings, resulted in the banning of all but four sequences at the Council of Trent (1545-63). The *Stabat Mater* unfortunately was not one of the four surviving sequences, and hence it was removed from the Liturgy until 1727, when Pope Benedict XIII sanctioned that it be reinstated. Consequently, the *Stabat Mater* was then incorporated into the Roman Breviary, and it became part of the Office for the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which is celebrated on the Friday following Passion Sunday. In 1814, “Pope Pius VII established a second feast of the



Dolours [sorrows],” which is on September 15 (Jeffers 1988, 205). However, Mearns disagrees, and claims that the office of the Seven Dolours in September, uses other hymns” (Mearns 1985, 1083). In the Roman Breviary the text is divided into three sections. Each section is celebrated at a different Office service. The first section includes verses 1-5, and this is sung at Vespers. Verses 6-7, beginning with the text “Sancta Mater istud agas,” is part of the Matins service, and the remaining verses 8-10, beginning with “Virgo virginum praeclara,” is sung at Lauds. The scriptural passages on which the *Stabat Mater* text is based include John 19:25, Luke 2:35, Zacharias 13:6, II Corinthians 4:10, and Galatians 6:17 (Jeffers 1988, 206).

### **The Placement of Poulenc’s *Stabat Mater* in History**

The *Stabat Mater* text was polyphonically set by composers as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Prominent Renaissance and early Baroque composers include Josquin, Palestrina, Lassus and Alessandro Scarlatti. Domenico Scarlatti’s setting for ten-voice chorus and *basso continuo* can be considered quite progressive in its increase of harmonic elements. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it became most common to use small orchestras and to structure the piece in a cantata form, with sections scored for chorus alternating with solos and duets. Caldara’s admirable setting even includes two trombones. Pergolesi chose to omit the chorus entirely, and merely set his for soprano and counter-tenor soloists with orchestra. Italian composers such as Caldara “normally imposed some kind of tonal unity ... by beginning and ending in the same key and by pursuing a logical course through a series of related keys for the rest of the work” (Caldwell and Boyd 1980, 36).



Haydn and Mozart also wrote *Stabat Mater* settings; however, Mozart's early setting was lost, and in Malcolm Boyd's opinion, "Haydn's is not representative of his best work" (Caldwell and Boyd 1980, 37). In 1815 Schubert wrote a *Stabat Mater*; however, it only uses the first twelve lines of the poem and simply repeats this text with slightly different music.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most *Stabat Mater* settings were far too ambitious and dramatic for liturgical use, and thus they became part of concert hall repertoire. The size and role of the orchestra greatly increased, and in certain *Stabat Mater* settings, composers seemed increasingly more removed from the meaning of the text. The operatic arias contained in Rossini's setting, for example, are not very well suited to the sensitive text at hand. Liszt's monumental *Stabat Mater* is part of an even larger work, his oratorio *Christus*. Dvořák's setting is very beautiful, yet once again there is a lack of care for the text. This very often results in inappropriate text accentuation and a tremendous amount of text repetition. In comparison, Verdi's *Stabat Mater* is extremely concise, without any text repetition. Boyd believes that it is Verdi's example of brevity and sincerity, that most 20<sup>th</sup> century composers followed (Caldwell and Boyd 1980, 37). Prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century settings which precede Poulenc's include those by Karol Szymanowski (1925-26) and Lennox Berkeley (1947).

A general knowledge of earlier *Stabat Mater* settings is vital so that one can infer if Poulenc was conforming or innovative in his approach. With time, the *Stabat Mater* became increasingly more sectional. Josquin's early setting is in two parts, while Palestrina's is in four. Particularly after 1650, once the *Stabat Mater* began to adopt more of a cantata form, it consisted of several smaller sections. There was no set rule as to how many movements the work should



comprise. Some composers, such as A. Scarlatti had as many as eighteen movements, while Szymanowski's 20<sup>th</sup>-century setting has merely six movements. It is however, most commonly divided into ten or twelve movements. Like Pergolesi's setting, Poulenc's *Stabat Mater* is divided into twelve movements.

They are:

1. Stabat mater dolorosa (*Très calme*)
2. Cujus animam gementem (*Allegro molto - Très violent*)
3. O quam tristis (*Très lent*)
4. Quae moerebat (*Andantino*)
5. Quis est homo (*Allegro molto - Prestissimo*)
6. Vidit suum (*Andante*)
7. Eja mater (*Allegro*)
8. Fac ut ardeat (*Maestoso*)
9. Sancta mater (*Moderato - Allegretto*)
10. Fac ut portem (*Tempo de sarabande*)
11. Inflammaus et accensus (*Animé et très rythmé*)
12. Quando corpus (*Très calme*)

### **Importance of Sacred Choral Music in Composers' Oeuvre**

Examining the choral output of Poulenc's contemporaries, it is easy to infer that Poulenc is among few composers who wrote sacred choral music, especially sacred music which utilizes texts from the Catholic faith. Looking more specifically at the output of his French contemporaries, the amount of choral music is very limited, with sacred choral music being even more sparse. Gabriel Fauré, whose music Poulenc loathed, is one of the few other French composers





who wrote more than a handful of sacred choral music. Debussy employed a chorus in various orchestral works, and there are five pieces listed under Debussy's choral music output, although three of them are unpublished, and none specifically use a sacred text. Satie wrote only two choral works, one of which is sacred. *Messe des pauvres* is scored for chorus with organ or piano accompaniment. Ravel on the other hand did not write any sacred choral music. Henri Hell truthfully expresses that "after the *Requiem* of Fauré, *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* and certain of the organ works of Messiaen, Poulenc is the one composer who has re-introduced an authentic religious note into French music" (Hell 1959, 45). Furthermore, within Poulenc's entire compositional output, choral music figures very prominently. "The number of works he wrote in this genre was surpassed only by that of songs." In total there are nineteen choral works, as well as three stage works that utilize a chorus (Daniel 1982, 199). Of the nineteen choral works, twelve are specifically sacred.

## Orchestration

The orchestra in Poulenc's *Stabat Mater* consists of 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets in B flat, bass clarinet in B flat, 3 bassoons, 4 horns in F, 2 trumpets in C, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 2 harps, soprano solo, chorus (S, A, T, Bar., B), and strings. The orchestra used by Poulenc was substantially decreased in size from that of the mid-to late-19<sup>th</sup> century, when composers such as Berlioz and Mahler were employing huge orchestral forces in their monumental choral works. Moreover, Poulenc's choice of instruments is also very standard, similar to the Classical orchestra. Particularly characteristic of French composers, although not exclusive to them, is the use of harp.



In comparison with Poulenc's *Gloria* (1959), his other large sacred choral work with orchestra, the orchestra in the *Stabat Mater* plays much more of a subsidiary role. Its purpose is to help establish emotion and mood, and to provide brief transitions from one section to the next. Poulenc remarked "my *Stabat* is an *a cappella* chorus, my *Gloria* is a large choral symphony" (Nichols 1993, 9). In 19<sup>th</sup> century *Stabat Mater* settings, the orchestra often played extensive introductions to movements. In Rossini's, for example, the opening orchestral introduction lasts 31 measures, and in Dvorák's it extends for 70 measures. Poulenc's longest orchestral passage lasts for merely seven measures. The orchestra very seldom doubles the voice parts, rather it is strongly used for picturesque effects. Moreover, the vast amount of *a cappella* sections is astonishing, and highly effective. In the *a cappella* portions, Poulenc is able to bring the same intimacy and sentiment of his sacred motets to this substantially larger work. These exquisite neo-Renaissance passages are harmonically very well crafted. It is this fusion of old styles and new techniques that brings so much appeal to this work.

An interesting observation with respect to orchestration is Poulenc's lack of simultaneous employment of the entire orchestra and chorus. Only once in the entire 45 minutes of music are all instruments and full chorus heard concomitantly. Poulenc reserves this climactic point for the penultimate movement of the work. At rehearsal 66 [hereafter, rehearsal will be abbreviated r.], several instruments are added to the texture, and finally for the last three measures in this movement the full complement of orchestra and chorus is used. The dramatic text accompanying this full texture is, "ad palmam victoriae" (to palm of victory).



Additional places where Poulenc comes very close to a full *tutti* include the following:

- 1.) In movement 3, the first time the text “Fuit illa benedicta” (was that blessed [in reference to the Mother of the Only-Begotten]) is sung, it is a *cappella*. It returns twice later in the movement, accompanied by all instruments, except the bass clarinet. Additionally, almost all the employed instruments are *divisi*.
- 2.) In movement 5, Poulenc comes very close to using the full complement of instruments to accompany phrases such as “tanto supplicio” (so much distress), “dolentem cum filio” (suffering with Son), and in the final measure of this movement on the word “subditum” (subject to).
- 3.) In movement 9 to bring out the phrase “crucifixo con dolore” (crucified with grief), all instruments except the piccolo and third trombone accompany this text at a *ff* dynamic, with accents and *tenuto* markings in several of the instrumental parts.

Considering that this is a 20<sup>th</sup>-century piece, the instrumental techniques are very conservative. Occasional harmonics, and alternation between playing with and without mutes form the majority of the performing techniques required throughout the work. Additionally, the strings frequently alternate between *arco* and *pizzicato*. Sometimes Poulenc even layers these techniques, such as in the opening six measures, where the first double basses play *pizzicato*, while the second double basses play *arco*. In movement 4, Poulenc asks that the strings begin the movement *sur la touche*, meaning on the fingerboard. Playing on the fingerboard results in a softer, fainter tone. Finally, in the ninth movement the





strings are asked to play *saltando*. When playing *saltando*, the player moves the wrist in a rapid up-down motion, causing the bow to bounce on the string. The text at this point, “tui nati vulnerati,” makes reference to the wounded Son, who deigned to suffer for the salvation of humanity. One might speculate that Poulenc chose this technique here because *saltando* requires increased control and focus, and the resulting sound is very persistent and intense, much like the control and focus Christ had as He endured the persistent and intense pain imposed on Him.

### **Poulenc’s General Style and Compositional Techniques**

In his book entitled *French Music*, Martin Cooper suitably describes Poulenc as “a musical clown of the first order, a brilliant musical mimic and an adroit craftsman, who pieces together the most heterogeneous collection of musical styles to form an unmistakably personal style of his own” (Cooper 1961, 194-95). The musical clown Cooper is referring to best describes Poulenc’s early compositional years, when he was a member of *Les Six*, and was greatly influenced by the music of Eric Satie. Poulenc never lost this light-hearted, flippant approach; he simply employed it less frequently. In its place, several techniques surfaced.

The *Litanies* mark the beginning of Poulenc’s sacred works, exemplifying a profound extension of his compositional palate more akin to sacred music. By the mid-30s, Poulenc’s music begins to take on a more serious, sensitive style. Keith Daniel designates the term neo-romantic to generally describe Poulenc’s compositional output between 1936 and 1952. The *Stabat Mater* falls within this period, as do all of his sacred choral works except two, *Laudes de Saint Antoine de Padoue* (1957-59), and *Gloria* (1959).



There are numerous characteristics which are common to Poulenc's sacred choral music. Already in the *Litanies*, a strong sense of lyricism appears. This becomes increasingly more prominent in his successive choral music, and it is most evident in the *Stabat Mater*. Along with warm lyricism comes what many consider to be Poulenc's most effective technique, melody. His melodies are diatonic and most often triadic or scalar. Virgil Thomson once remarked, "Poulenc is incontestably the greatest writer of melodies in our time" (Daniel 1982, 62). Because Poulenc's choral music is extremely homophonic, his gift of harmony also becomes significantly noteworthy. Furthermore, the frequency of arbitrary modulation found in his works results in a spontaneous choral sonority which is most colourful.

### A Closer Look at the Music

Examining Poulenc's *Stabat Mater* in its entirety results in the observation of various structural elements. Even though there is much contrast between successive movements, especially with respect to mood and tempo, there are several unifying elements as well. Semitone and occasionally major second relationships between key centers is a prominent consolidating feature that occurs between and within the twelve movements. For example, the tonic keys of movements 1, 2, and 3, are respectively A minor, B flat minor, and B minor, hence the semitone relationship. In movement 4, Poulenc seemingly disrupts the pattern by choosing the key of A flat major. However, A flat is still within the semi-tone relationship by being a semi-tone below the initial tonality of the piece, as well as a semi-tone below the opening key of the next movement. Since movement 5 begins in A minor and ends in B flat minor, this naturally leads to the tonality of B



minor in movement 6. Movement 6 is a central and pivotal movement since it is the midpoint of the entire work. Additionally, thematic material from the first movement returns in movement 6, as well as in movement 12. Semitone relationships between key centers still occur in movements 7 to 12; however, this structurally unifying element is not as rigid in the second half of this piece, and there are occasional whole tone relationships as well.

#### Tonal Relationships Between and Within Movements

Movement 1 - A minor	
Movement 2 - B flat minor	
Movement 3 - B minor	
Movement 4 - A flat major	
Movement 5 - A minor	
- ends in B flat minor	
Movement 6 - B minor	
Movement 7 - E flat major	
Movement 8 - C sharp minor	
Movement 9 - C minor / B flat minor	
- ends in B flat minor	
Movement 10-A minor	
-progresses through B flat minor	
- ends in C sharp major	
Movement 11-2 sections:	a.) B minor
	b.) B flat minor - moving to E flat minor
Movement 12-begins in E flat minor	
-progresses to E flat major	

By taking a closer look at the individual movements within the *Stabat Mater*, several general characteristics about Poulenc's music, as well as specific qualities of his sacred choral music, can be observed. At the very beginning of the piece, Poulenc specifies that the opening be played "très calme," at a tempo of quarter note = 56. In the key of A minor, the woodwinds and strings begin to paint the scene of the Blessed Mother weeping at the foot of her Son's cross. The first two measures feature arpeggios in the upper strings over a tonic pedal.



Pedal points frequently occur in Poulenc's music. As the strings continue these arpeggios, which move mostly in thirds and sixths, the double basses proceed down in stepwise motion and by the fourth measure reach the dominant, E. This stepwise motion in the bass part exists very often in this opening movement, occasionally with octave displacement, resulting in leaps of major and minor sevenths. The arpeggio figure, which consists of eighth notes slurred together in two-note groupings, conveys a sense of weeping and lament. At r. 1, the flute and clarinet take up the arpeggio and the basses of the chorus enter, intensely describing the grieving mother. Poulenc colours the word "lacrimosa" (weeping) with chromaticism, which prepares the entry of the full choir on a C minor chord at r. 2. By the fourth measure following r. 3, the key of F minor is established. At this point the text "dum pendebat filius" (while hung Son) is first introduced by the basses, and it is then repeated two more times. The extreme pain in this statement is reinforced by accents in the horns. It is interesting to note that Poulenc slightly alters the texture for the two successive repetitions of this phrase, featuring first the bottom four voices, followed by the top four. Moreover, for the last repetition, he departs from F minor and through two successive diminished seventh chords followed by the dominant seventh of A minor, he returns to the tonic at r. 5 for a restatement of the opening theme. Immediate repetition of short phrases is a very common feature in Poulenc's choral music. Usually the repeats have very subtle if any differences, and very often the difference is textural (see Example 1).

One other point of interest in the choral parts at r. 3<sup>4</sup> [fourth measure of rehearsal 3] is the brief appearance of melismatic writing and the miniscule hint at counterpoint (see Example 1). Poulenc almost exclusively wrote homophonically





for chorus, and he distributed the text mostly syllabically. Since the text is set syllabically, he is able to get through it very quickly and hence there is a tremendous amount of text repetition. Poulenc's lack of counterpoint is not a negative quality in any way, since a homophonic texture allows him to fully exploit his harmonic craft. When Poulenc studied with Koechlin between 1921-1924, Koechlin soon recognized Poulenc's lack of gift for counterpoint and "consequently he did not burden him with the usual contrapuntal exercises." Rather he encouraged Poulenc to write harmonisations on themes of Bach, and from this Poulenc "gradually acquired the subtle art of a *cappella* writing" (Hell 22, 1959). Daniel further adds that "Poulenc's predominantly chordal texture seems to have been derived, above all, from the music of Claude Le Jeune (1530-1600), for whom he often expressed admiration" (Daniel 1982, 200).

Example 1 (Mvt. 1, r. 3<sup>4</sup> - r. 4<sup>4</sup>):

The musical score is for a vocal ensemble (Soprano, Contralto, Tenor, Baritone, Bass) and piano accompaniment. It is in 4/4 time, marked *pp* (pianissimo). The lyrics are: "Dum pen-de - bat fi-li-us". The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The second system shows the vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Dum pen-de - bat fi-li-us".



Poulenc's syllabic setting of the text often contributes to the problem of improper word stress. Immediately in the opening bass part, this occurs on the word "dolorosa." The way it is set, results in a natural tendency to accent the "-lo-" syllable because it falls on the downbeat, even though the correct word accent falls on the "-ro-" syllable (see Example 2). Many more examples of misaccentuation may be found throughout the entire work. Conductors are faced with the question of whether they should still consciously try to fight the natural tendencies of the meter and work toward proper word stress. In the quicker, more dramatic movements of the piece, particularly movement 5, "Quis es homo" improper syllabic stress occurs even more frequently. The main thrust of a movement such as this one is to create an atmosphere which brings meaning to the text; as a result, this issue of text stresses not exactly falling in the correct places becomes a recurring concern.

Example 2 (Mvt. 1, r. 1<sup>1</sup> - r. 1<sup>4</sup>, bass part):

The image shows two staves of a musical score for the bass part. The first staff begins with a bass clef and a common time signature. Above the staff, the dynamic marking *pp* is followed by the instruction *très intense et très doux*. The lyrics under the first staff are: Sta - bat ma - ter do -. The second staff continues the melody with lyrics: - lo - - ro - - sa - Jux - ta cru -. A dynamic marking *mf* appears above the second staff. The music consists of quarter and eighth notes, with some rests.

Immediately preceding r. 5, Poulenc uses a German 6<sup>th</sup> chord to modulate back into the tonic, A minor. This also marks the return of the opening "Stabat mater" phrase; this time however, the tenors are added, and the weeping arpeggio theme remains in the strings. The choral and orchestral texture thickens at r. 6. A few very sudden dynamic contrasts occur immediately before r. 7, as



the orchestral texture continues to diminish, leaving the choir *a cappella* on an A minor triad for the final word “filius” (Son). Mellers aptly describes this passage: “seldom has a minor triad sounded so irremediably minor” (Mellers 1993, 141).

In movement 1, the opening choric bass part, as well as the arpeggiated theme, frequently use the interval of a minor third. In the emotionally-charged second movement “Cujus animam gementem” (*Allegro molto - Très violent*), the prominence of this interval continues and it is immediately apparent in the bassoon, cello, and double bass parts. It is soon taken up by the third trombone and timpani. In addition, the idea of stepwise motion also persists in this movement, with particular emphasis on chromatic semitones. The passage of repeating semitones in the bass clarinet and double bass parts found at the beginning of this movement is very haunting and effective. Mellers comments that these “flickering sixteenths are serpentine, perhaps prompted by the words ‘pertranssivit gladius’ (a sword pierced through) (Mellers 1993, 141). This sixteenth-note cell is modified and transferred throughout the orchestra, most often utilizing the intervals of a minor third and semitone (see Example 3). Daniel attributes Poulenc’s occasional use of cellular writing to his study of the works of Mussorgsky and Debussy (Daniel 1982, 59).

Example 3 (Mvt. 2, opening 5 measures):

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Violoncelles (Violoncelles) and 2. Contrebasses (2. Double Basses). The score consists of five measures. The top staff is for Violoncelles and the bottom staff is for 2. Contrebasses. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The first measure has a forte (f) dynamic marking. The second measure has a 'Div.' marking above the staff. The third measure has a 'Div.' marking above the staff. The fourth measure has a 'Div.' marking above the staff. The fifth measure has a 'Div.' marking above the staff. The score shows a sixteenth-note cell being modified and transferred throughout the orchestra, often utilizing intervals of a minor third and semitone.

The first time the text “pertransivit” is sung by the choir, the majority of the accompanying orchestral parts have *sforzando* and accent markings, or at least horizontal dashes (*tenutos*) above the notes. Moreover, in many places within the





movement Poulenc asks for a very dry, *staccato* delivery from the instruments. At r. 8<sup>13</sup> Poulenc desires that the baritone part emerge from the texture and consequently marks it *fff*. In addition, the tenors double the baritones on this line. Accents in the bassoon, trumpet, viola and cello parts really “pierce through” the texture and facilitate the meaning of “pertransivit.” Just prior to rehearsal 10, a modulation to C minor occurs. A real *pesante*, intense atmosphere sets in at r. 10, yet this comes to a sudden halt, and one full measure of silence precedes the next section, which is starkly contrasting. In the key of F minor, the dynamics drop to *pp* for the first time in this movement. The altos and basses have a *legato* alternation between F and G-flat, while the other voice parts sustain an open fifth. A throbbing eighth-note pedal point on F is played by the second horn. This semitone alternation in the alto and baritone parts is remarkably similar to the opening alto line in the first movement of Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* (1930). Poulenc greatly admired Stravinsky and his music, and it is very possible that Poulenc could have had Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* in mind when he wrote this passage.

Poulenc opens the next movement with a complete statement of the text scored entirely *a cappella*. It is one of the most moving passages in the entire work, and it also contains a genuine sample of the many colourful harmonic progressions which Poulenc was so capable of writing (see harmonic analysis of opening 4 measures - Example 4). As beautiful as this opening phrase is, Poulenc’s casual approach to proper word stress is fairly noticeable. The word “afflicta” is set twice, in immediate succession. The first time with proper syllabic stress, the second time without (see Example 4). After the opening six measures in B minor, it becomes increasingly more difficult to become firmly established in a



particular key, as Poulenc's fondness and frequency of modulation becomes evident.

Example 4 (Mvt. 3, opening 6 measures):

12  
Très lent.  $\text{♩} = 56$

*pp*

SOPR.  
0 quam tris - tis et af - flic - ta

CONT.  
0 quam tris - tis et af - flic - ta af - flic - ta

TEN.  
0 quam tris - tis et af - flic - ta af - flic - ta

BAR.  
0 quam tris - tis et af - flic - ta af - flic - ta

BAS.  
i ii<sup>2</sup> vii<sup>o4</sup> /  $\text{V}^b$  i vi<sup>7</sup> ii<sup>4</sup>  $\text{V}$  af - flic - ta

In this third movement direct nominal reference is made to the Mother of God. This is the second time it occurs in the poem thus far. The first time was at the opening of the piece, as the basses sang the text “Stabat mater.” Here again Poulenc chooses to have the basses intone the phrase “Mater unigeniti” the first time it occurs. Whether or not Poulenc used the basses consciously in this way is uncertain. The next two times the Mother of God is referred to in the text, the scoring features more voice parts than just the basses. However, at the opening of movement 9 the basses once again invoke the Holy Mother - “Sancta Mater” (for a complete text translation see Appendix B).

At r. 16, Poulenc features oboe, clarinet and bassoon in a very expressive two-bar interjection. At the very end of this third movement, following a recapitulation of the choir’s opening phrase, the lower strings have a similar



progression of three chords, the last of which ends the movement on the tonic, B minor.

As *Stabat Mater* settings became more sectional, “to avoid monotony and to make the slow sections more impressive, composers now had to use as much variety of tempo as possible” (Robertson 1968, 137). Often this resulted in tempos that were rather inappropriate considering the meaning and expression of the text. It is difficult to speculate what Poulenc was thinking when he composed the fourth movement, “Quae moerebat.” The text refers to the tremendous suffering of the Blessed Mother as she beheld the torments of her dying Son. Poulenc set this movement in the key of A-flat major, and designated a quicker tempo (quarter note = 88), giving this movement a feeling of lilt and ease, which is hardly what the Virgin Mary experienced at the time. Throughout the *Stabat Mater*, Poulenc continually provides contrast between successive movements. At times, faster tempos such as in “Quis est homo” are dramatically very effective, and hence the meaning of the text certainly comes alive. In the “Quae moerebat” movement, however, Poulenc’s conscious attempt at variety results in a jovial and almost pastoral sounding movement which does not adhere to the sentiment of Mary’s suffering. One must recall that Poulenc’s general compositional style did not necessarily change over time; it merely became more inclusive. This movement recalls the wittier approach Poulenc colourfully brought to his earlier works, primarily those in the 1920s.

Two interesting elements to examine in this movement are texture and phrasing. Poulenc pairs up various voice parts and instruments and sets them in opposition in a dialogue consisting mostly of two-bar phrases. He extends the phrasing to four bars at “Nati poenas inclyti.” Regular two- and four-bar phrases



are extremely common in Poulenc's music. At r. 20, the full choir is featured for the first time in this movement. The dynamic marking is *pianissimo* for all voice parts except the tenors, who have a *mf* marking. In his choral music, Poulenc makes very specific dynamic distinctions when he wants various voice parts to emerge from the texture. Considering Poulenc's enormous song output, he had extensive experience writing for the voice. This experience can be seen in his choral music, and contributes to its success. General speaking, the *tessitura* of the choral parts is most appropriate and well-suited to the specified dynamics and nuances. Additionally, a frequent feature in his choral music is the placement of short rests at the ends of phrases. For choral singers, this feature allows time for a breath, as well as the simultaneous placement of final consonants.

At r. 20<sup>4</sup>, several instruments are added to the texture. At this point, one also notices that the sopranos are doubling the tenors, which is yet another common feature in Poulenc's choral music. What draws attention to this four-measure phrase beginning at r. 20<sup>4</sup>, is the momentary departure from a completely homophonic texture. Additionally, the text in the soprano and tenor parts, "et tremebat," does not occur anywhere in the *Stabat Mater* poem. Some of Poulenc's music, particularly his *Gloria* is notorious for misprints. Here, however, it is more likely to assume that this is an insertion or a slight alteration in the poetry and not a misprint. There is, however, a true misprint on the downbeat of the fifth measure following r. 20. The tenors should have the word "dum" and not "cum." This mistake occurs only in Salabert's full score edition, and it is printed correctly in the Salabert piano-vocal score.

Poulenc's more casual setting of this fourth movement is definitely puzzling; however, in view of the extremely dramatic and intense movement to







follow, one may speculate that he needed to relieve tension in the movement immediately prior, so that the fifth movement would have a greater dramatic impact, and indeed it does. Similarly, in Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, the "Quae moerebat" movement is in a quicker tempo - *allegro*.

A strong characteristic in Poulenc's music, recalling a feature in much of Stravinsky's music, is frequency of meter changes, and in the fifth movement "Quis est homo," meter changes occur rather abundantly. This movement exudes a strong feeling of terror. Poulenc achieves this with the tremendously agitated sixteenth-note passages, the barbaric punctuation in the brass, and the shrill-sounding descending melismatic scales in the soprano and tenor parts. The words Poulenc chooses to set with these descending scales are "tanto" and "dolentem;" "tanto" meaning "so much," referring to the amount of distress, and "dolentem" meaning "suffering." With use of fermatas on the barlines, immediately preceding r. 24, the questions posed by the choir are more successfully communicated. Moreover, the sudden reduction in texture and dynamics is also very effective. The *prestissimo* section that follows brings even more drama to this movement, and the triplets further intensify the feeling of bewilderment and anguish.

As previously noted, in the first two movements of the work prominence is given to major and minor seconds, as well as major and minor thirds. In this fifth movement, particularly after r. 25, minor thirds play an important role, recurring frequently in several parts. Movement 5 begins in A minor and ends in B-flat minor which leads to the tonality of B minor in movement 6.

Movement 6, "Vidit suum" is a central movement for several reasons. First, it is in this movement that the soprano soloist sings for the first time. She



begins with a beautiful descending line consisting of double-dotted rhythm, accompanied by a pulsating B-minor chord in the upper strings, as well as a lyrical, dynamic swell in the cello and bass parts immediately preceding her initial entry. The rhythm of her descending line connotes profound pathos. Mellers suggests that in Poulenc, as in many classical composers, the double-dotted rhythm may signify physical pain (Mellers 1993, 143). The third time the soprano soloist returns to this descending scale, which covers more than a single octave, it is transposed up a major second. The accompanying line sung by the baritones and doubled by the cellos is also very expressive. With the cellos playing in the upper register, their part naturally emerges from the texture.

This sixth movement is significant with respect to the overall structure and unity of the entire work. Contained within this movement are several previous themes, primarily ones introduced in the first movement. Immediately at the beginning of this movement, the quiescent eighth-note pulse played by the upper strings is reminiscent of the cello part at the beginning of movement 1. Six measures after r. 30 the soprano soloist is doubled for the first time by flute. The first three intervals of this phrase, sung to the words “dum emisit,” are identical to the intervals of “lacrimosa,” three measures following r. 3 (see Example 5a). Moreover, in the eighth measure of r. 30, the soprano melody at “morientem desolatum” is identical to the soprano line of the chorus at r. 3, set to the text “juxta crucem lacrimosa” (see Example 5b). Another example involves the bass part at r. 32, which contains an upward leap of a minor sixth. Similarly, four measures after r. 3 in movement 1, the basses have an upward ascent of a minor sixth; followed by a rhythm consisting of two eighth notes and a quarter note on the text “filius” in movement 1, which is identical to that found with the text



"spiritum" in movement 6 (see Example 5c). This movement is also unified with other movements through the frequent appearance of minor thirds and semitones.

Example 5a (Mvt. 6, r. 30<sup>6</sup> & Mvt. 1, r. 3<sup>3</sup>):

Example 5a shows musical notation for two parts. The left part features a vocal line with lyrics "Dum e - mi - sit" and four instrumental staves, each with a *pp* dynamic marking. The right part features a vocal line with lyrics "la - cri - mo" and four instrumental staves, each with a *mf* dynamic marking. Both parts include interval markings: P4, -3, +2, and x4 (or o4).

Example 5b (Mvt. 6, r. 30<sup>8-9</sup> & Mvt. 1, r. 3<sup>1-2</sup>):

Example 5b shows musical notation for two parts. The left part features a vocal line with lyrics "Mo - ri - en - tem, de - so - la - tum" and four instrumental staves, each with a *mf* dynamic marking. The right part features a vocal line with lyrics "Mo - ri - en - tem, de - so - la - tum" and four instrumental staves, each with a *mf* dynamic marking.

Example 5c shows musical notation for five parts: Soprano (S.), Contralto (C.), Tenor (T.), Baritone (Bar.), and Bass (Bas.). Each part has a vocal line with lyrics "Jux - ta cru - cem la - cri - mo - sa" and an instrumental line. The vocal parts are marked with a *p* dynamic, and the instrumental parts are marked with a *p* dynamic. A bracket with the number 3 is placed above the first measure of the vocal parts.



Example 5c (Mvt. 6, r. 32<sup>1-2</sup> & Mvt. 1, r. 3<sup>4-5</sup>):

Dum e - mi - sit spi - ri - tum

32

Baß. *très en dehors* Dum pen - de - bat fi - li - us

Beginning at r. 32, “shrill woodwind cries break out as the chorus end ‘Dum emisit spiritum’ as if earth felt the wound” of Christ’s death (Robertson 1968, 148). The orchestra continues with an intense interlude lasting seven measures. This seven-measure interlude is the longest solely orchestral section within the entire piece. Comparably, the only other substantial section strictly for orchestra occurs at the very beginning of the *Stabat Mater*. That section also lasts seven measures. The number seven is significant and symbolic in relation to Mary and the *Stabat Mater*, recalling that the *Stabat Mater* text is part of the Office for the Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on the Friday following Passion Sunday. Whether or not Poulenc was conscious of this underlying symbolism is unclear.

At r. 34, the soprano soloist sings the opening “Stabat mater” theme, the same theme sung by the basses at the beginning of the first movement. Moreover, below this minor-third theme, the first violins and violas play the arpeggiated “weeping” theme which also originated in movement 1. This time, however, it is played in the key of B minor, over a tonic pedal. The movement’s ending is similar to that of movement 1, with an *a cappella* tonic chord, now sung on the text “spiritum.”





Movement 7 could well be subjected to the same criticism as movement 4, in that it seems far too jovial and casual to be a movement within a *Stabat Mater*. Here again, Poulenc composes music which sounds inappropriate considering the assigned text, a supplication of humankind to Mary, asking for her assistance so that it may feel and share the force of the Blessed Mother's grief. Since the text makes direct reference to the grief and mourning of Mary, this playful-sounding setting, beginning in the key of E-flat major, seems rather unfitting. However, Poulenc perhaps wanted to comment on how negligent and apathetic humanity can often be toward religion.

Once again, there is a correlation between Poulenc's and Pergolesi's setting of this movement. In Pergolesi's 1736 *Stabat Mater*, the designated tempo of this movement is *allegro*. However, even though Pergolesi's setting shares this same tempo, it has a more somber tone than Poulenc's. At the complete opposite end of the spectrum, this particular movement in Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* is a very dramatic funeral march.

The opening of the next movement does not sound like it was written by Poulenc; nor does it particularly sound like mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century repertoire. It begins a *cappella* in a quasi-fugal fashion in the key of C-sharp minor. Ironically enough, here again the beginning of this movement closely resembles Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*, in that Pergolesi also opens his "Fac ut ardeat" movement with a quasi-fugue. It is interesting to observe these similarities and speculate Poulenc's interest in previous *Stabat Mater* settings, particularly Pergolesi's. However, it is very difficult to find any reference that supports an interest of Poulenc in Pergolesi and his music. Therefore, these congruities are likely coincidental. A unique feature of this eighth movement, rare in Poulenc's music, is the touch of non-



imitative polyphony at r. 43. This concise and sincere movement ends with a tonic seventh chord. The addition of a seventh to tonic triads at final cadences occurs frequently in Poulenc's music.

Following such an innocent-sounding neo-Renaissance movement, "Sancta mater" opens with a great harmonic clash between B-flat and C. Contrary to this more contemporary harmonic idiom, is the opening bass line which has the feeling of plainchant, and is based on a pentatonic scale. The tonality of this entire opening section is quite ambiguous, hinting at both B flat minor and C minor. Yet, this harmonic uncertainty and disaccord is very effective, especially when setting text such as "crucifixi." The *allegretto* section which begins at r. 45 is described by Mellers as being "mysterious and contrarious, as though we are scared, as well we might be, of the prospect before us" (Mellers 1993, 144). The *saltando* marking for first violins contributes to this feeling of insecurity and unrest.

"Sancta mater" is one of the more extensive movements, and unlike previous movements, it consists of several smaller sections, with corresponding tempo and character changes. The word painting in this movement is noteworthy. Extensive chromaticism accompanies the text in the *allegretto* section, which contains words such as "vulnerati" (wounded), "pati" (to suffer), and "poenas" (pains). The idea of weeping ("flere") is orchestrated with a trill lasting two measures in the violin, cello, and double bass parts. The phrase "crucifixo condolere" (to suffer with the Crucified) is marked in the orchestra with a rigorous ascending scale in the horn and trumpet parts, and heavy accents in the bassoon and flute parts. The way in which the "crucifixo condolere" is set for the choir results in a natural tendency to accent beat two, thereby distorting the proper syllabic accent of the word. The two measures prior to r. 48 contain one of the



densest textures in the entire work. Only the piccolo and third trombone are not playing at this time. At r. 49 the key of F-sharp major is firmly established. This begins yet another section of this movement, consisting of a three-fold repetition of the phrase “*virgo virginum praeclara*.” Since Poulenc strongly favoured brevity, this repetition of a larger section is fairly unusual. It is however common for him to repeat short phrases in immediate succession. Each time the “*virgo virginum*” returns, it is coloured with a chromatic ascent in the flute and bassoon parts. The “*Sancta Mater*” movement ends in the key of B-flat minor, and the next movement begins in A minor. Here again there is evidence of a semitone key shift between movements.

As already noted, Poulenc frequently utilized techniques of the past. He chose to set this tenth movement in the style of a Baroque *sarabande*. As with the descending soprano solo line in movement 6, he again utilized double-dotted rhythm. The opening four-measure passage played by the strings is answered by the clarinet, and the choir and timpani enter shortly thereafter. The steady quarter-note tonic pedal point on A in the timpani, cellos and double basses, juxtaposed against the dotted rhythm in the upper strings, yields a processional, dirge-like sonority. At r. 57, the key of B-flat minor is similarly established with a tonic pedal point. Again there is a semitone relationship between B-flat minor and the opening key of this movement, A minor. To colour the phrase “*et plagas*” (and stripes), Poulenc uses a B-flat ninth chord with the soprano soloist going up to the C flat.

With the direction “*attaquer de suite*” (to continue immediately without pausing) at the end of movement 11, Poulenc’s intention is to link the two final movements. Movement 11 is in two contrasting sections, separated by a full-



measure rest with a fermata. The first section is in B minor, and beckons the intercession and defense of Mary on Judgement Day. The movement soon progresses to the key of E-flat minor over a persistent pedal point on the dominant. At r. 66, several instruments are added to the texture, the dynamics increase to *fortissimo*, and most parts have ascending lines, several of which are marked with *tenutos* and occasional accents. The diapason gradually increases in the final twelve measures of this movement, resulting in an overwhelming sense of triumph, highlighting these last two statements of the phrase “ad palmam victoriae” (to palm of victory) (see Example 6a). Without a pause, the final movement of this work begins with a stark contrast in dynamics, register, and texture. The texture is reduced to a *cappella* chorus, and the dynamic marking is *pianissimo*. Poulenc even scores the opening four measures of this twelfth movement for the four lowest voice parts in the chorus, omitting the sopranos. Additionally, the range between the voice parts seldom increases beyond an octave (see Example 6b).

A striking feature in this final movement involves Poulenc's frequent alternation of mode within a given tonality. For example, the movement begins and remains in E-flat minor for the first twelve measures. Suddenly, to highlight the word “gloria,” Poulenc makes a quick shift to E-flat major in the second measure of r. 68 as well as the second measure of r. 69 (see Example 7a). Similarly, changes of mode occur in the last four measures preceding r. 70. Here, Poulenc juxtaposes A minor and A major, above which the soprano soloist sings a pentatonic melody (see Example 7b).





Example 6a (Mvt. 11, r. 66<sup>3</sup> - end of movement):

[illegible]

attaquer de suite



## Example 6b (Mvt. 12, initial 4 measures):

SOPRANOS

CONTRALTOS

TÉNORS

BARTTOS

BASSES

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur

67

Example 7a (Mvt. 12, r. 67<sup>8</sup> - r. 69<sup>3</sup>):

sans presser

68

S. Pa - ra - di si glo - ri - a, Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si

C. Pa - ra - di si glo - ri - a, Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si

T. Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a, Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si

Bar. Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a, Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si

Bas. Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a, Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

glo - ri - a

glo - ri - a

glo - ri - a

glo - ri - a

glo - ri - a

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur

Fac ut a - nimae do - ne - tur

Fac ut a - nimae do - ne - tur

Fac ut a - nimae do - ne - tur

Fac ut a - nimae do - ne - tur

Fac ut a - nimae do - ne - tur

Qua - do cor - pus mo - ri - e - tur



## Example 7a continued:

SOPRANO SOLO

[69]

*ff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a.

S. *ff* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si *fff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

C. *ff* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si *fff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

T. *ff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a *fff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

Bar. *ff* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si *fff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

Bas. *ff* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si *fff* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

Quan - do cor -

Example 7b (Mvt. 12, r. 69<sup>8</sup> - r. 70)

[70]

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a.

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a Pa - ra - di - si glo - ri - a

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si

[70]

*pp* Pa - ra - di - si Pa - ra - di - si





When and if Poulenc's music is criticized, it is often for its lack of formal structure and unity. In other words, at times his music is thought to be too sectional. Some argue that part of the reason his *Stabat Mater* is regarded as one of his most successful works is because the various stanzas and sections of the poetry lend themselves to creating a completely sectional work. However, when closely examined, Poulenc's *Stabat Mater* shows itself to be a strongly unified work. This element of unification is definitely clearly observed in the final movement. Firstly, Poulenc desires that the final movement be "très calme," just as he indicated at the very beginning of the piece. Moreover, at r. 70, the arpeggiated theme which opened the *Stabat Mater*, and reappeared in the pivotal 6<sup>th</sup> movement, is played here by the violins and violas, and at r. 71 in the clarinets. Also, at r. 70 the designated tempo for this section is identical to the opening tempo in movement 1 (quarter note = 56). The prominence of minor thirds and semitones becomes increasingly more noticeable as the movement nears the end. Finally, at r. 72<sup>3</sup>, the soprano soloist reminds the listener of the haunting minor third that the basses sang at the very opening of the entire work. The *Stabat Mater* ends on a dominant seventh chord. Roger Nichols suggests that since the last chord is "not a consonance," this implies Poulenc's belief that it is not so much an end, as a beginning (Nichols 1993, 8). One might infer that Poulenc's reawakened faith accepts the notion of an afterlife.

## Conclusion

"The innermost feelings of this man of contradictions were expressed in his choral music: emotion, sensitivity, and joyous affirmation" (Daniel 1982, 199). Poulenc remarked, "if you want to get an idea of my complex musical personality,





you'll find me completely myself as much in *Les Mamelles* as in my *Stabat Mater* (Audel 1978, 55). In the *Stabat Mater*, one learns a great deal about Poulenc, his "complex musical personality," and his compositional style. One of the most prominent features in his choral music and particularly in his *Stabat Mater*, is his eclectic compositional approach. Poulenc's style did not necessarily change with each successive year, rather it matured and became more inclusive as he became a more comprehensive composer.

In the *Stabat Mater*, one truly witnesses Poulenc's tremendous sensitivity and profound spirituality. The work also incorporates much of the past, from neo-Renaissance to neo-Romantic elements, yet it does so while incorporating the spontaneity of Poulenc's style and the freshness of a mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century work. "I know perfectly well that I'm not one of those composers who have made harmonic innovations like Igor [Stravinsky], Ravel or Debussy, but I think there's room for new music which doesn't mind using other people's chords" (Gowers et al., 1986, 211-212). Poulenc may not consider himself extremely innovative; however, his ability to fuse the past and the present, as well as his effective way of communicating so much of himself in his music contributes to its uniqueness.



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## Appendix A

Advertisement for the Première *Stabat Mater* Performance

## News

"Following the great success of Francis Poulenc's *Sinfonietta*, which has been given by several leading American Orchestras, the work was performed again in December by the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Walter Handl. His latest composition, a *Stabat Mater*, for Chorus and Orchestra will receive its first performance at the Strasbourg Festival this summer" (Chesterian, January 1951, 57).



## Appendix B

The Text of the *Stabat Mater* in Latin and EnglishMovement 1

Stábat Máter dolorósa  
 Stood Mother grieving

There stood the Mother grieving,  
 Beside the cross weeping,  
 While on it hung her Son.

Juxta crúcem lacrymósa,  
 next to cross weeping,

Dum pendébat Fílius.  
 while hung Son.

---

Movement 2

Cújus ánimam geméntem,  
 whose soul sighing,

Whose saddened soul,  
 Sighing and suffering,  
 A sword pierced through.

Contristátam et doléntem,  
 saddening and suffering,

Pertransívit gladius.  
 pierced through sword.

---

Movement 3

O quam trístis et afflícta  
 O how sad and afflicted

O how sad and how afflicted  
 Was that blessed Mother  
 Of the Only-Begotten!

Fúit ílla benedícta  
 was that blessed

Máter unigéniti!  
 Mother of Only-begotten!

---

Movement 4

Quae moerébat et dolébat,  
 Who was grieving and was suffering,

Loving Mother, who was grieving  
 And suffering, while she beheld  
 The torments of her glorious Son.

Pía Máter, dum vidébat  
 loving Mother, while she beheld

Náti poénas íncliti.  
 of Son torments glorious.

---



Movement 5

Quis est hómo qui non fléret,  
Who is man who not would weep,

Mátrém Chrísti si vidéret  
Mother of Christ if he should see

In tánto supplicio?  
In so much distress?

Quis non pósset contristári,  
Who not can be saddened,

Chrísti Mátrém contemplári  
of Christ Mother to behold

Doléntem cum Filio?  
suffering with Son?

Pro peccátis súae géntis  
For sins of his people

Vídít Jésum in torméntis,  
she saw Jesus in torments,

Et flagéllis súbditum.  
and whips subjected to.

---

Who is the man who would not weep  
If he should see the Mother of Christ  
In such great distress?

Who could not be saddened  
If he should behold the Mother of Christ  
Suffering with her only Son?

For the sins of his people,  
She saw Jesus in torments  
And subjected to stripes.

Movement 6

Vídít súum dúlcem nátum  
She saw her sweet begotten

Moriéndo desolátum,  
(by) dying forsaken,

Dum emísit spíritum.  
while he sent forth spirit.

---

She saw her own sweet Son,  
Whose dying caused his desolation,  
While he yielded up his Spirit.

Movement 7

Eja Máter, fons amóris,  
Oh Mother, fount of love,

Me sentíre vim dolóris  
me to feel force of grief

Oh Mother, fount of love,  
Make me feel the force of your grief,  
So that I may mourn with you,



Fac, ut técum lúgeam.  
Make, that with you I may mourn.

---

### Movement 8

Fac, ut árdeat cor méum  
Grant, that may burn heart my

In amándo Chrístum Déum,  
in loving Christ God,

Ut síbi compláceam.  
that to him I may be pleasing.

---

Grant that my heart may burn  
In loving Christ my God,  
So that I may be pleasing to him.

### Movement 9

Sáncta Máter, ístud ágas,  
Holy Mother, this may you do,

Crucifíxi fíge plágas  
of Crucified fix stripes

Córdi méo válíde.  
in heart my firmly.

Túi náti vulneráti,  
Of your begotten wounded,

Tam dignáti pro me páti,  
so deigned for me to suffer,

Poénas mécum dívide.  
pains with me share.

Fac me técum píe flére,  
Make me with you lovingly to weep,

Crucifíxo condolére,  
with Crucified to suffer,

Donec égo vixéro.  
as long as I shall live.

Júxta crúcem técum stáre,  
Next to cross with you to stand,

Et me tíbi sociáre  
and myself with you to join

Holy Mother, may you do this:  
Fix the stripes of the Crucified  
Deeply into my heart.

Share with me the pains  
Of your wounded Son  
Who deigned to suffer so much for me.

Make me lovingly weep with you,  
To suffer with the Crucified  
So long as I shall live.

To stand with you beside the cross,  
And to join with you in deep lament:  
This I long for and desire.





In pláncu desídero.  
in lament I desire.

Virgo vírginum praeclára,  
Virgins of virgins most excellent,

Míhi jam non sis amára,  
to me now not be bitter,

Fac me técum plángere.  
cause me with you to mourn.

---

O Virgin all virgins excelling,  
Be not inclement with me now;  
Cause me to mourn with you.

### Movement 10

Fac, ut pórtém Christi mortem,  
Grant, that I may bear of Christ death,

Passiónis fac consórtem,  
of passion make sharer,

Et plágas recólere.  
And stripes to be mindful of.

Fac me plágis vulnerári,  
Make me by wounds to be wounded,

Fac me crúce inebriári,  
cause me by cross to be inebriated,

Et cruóre Fílii.  
and by blood of Son.

---

Grant that I may bear the death of Christ;  
Make me a sharer in His Passion  
And ever mindful of his wounds.

Let me be wounded by His wounds,  
Cause me to be inebriated by the Cross  
And the Blood of your Son.

### Movement 11

Flámmis ne úrar succénsus  
By flames lest I burn enkindled

Per te, Virgo, sim defénsus  
through thee, Virgin, may I be defended

In díe judícii.  
on day of judgement.

Chríste, cum sit hinc exíre,  
Christ, when it is hence to go,

Da per Mátem me veníre  
grant through Mother me to come

Lest I burn in flames enkindled,  
May I, through thee, O Virgin,  
Be defended on Judgement Day.

O Christ, when from here I must depart,  
Grant that, through your Mother,  
I may obtain the palm of victory.



Ad pálmam victóriae.  
to palm of victory.

---

### Movement 12

Quándo córpūs moriétur,  
When body shall die,

Fac, ut ánimae donétur  
Grant, that to soul be given

Paradisi glória.  
of Paradise glory.

When my body perishes,  
Grant that my soul be given  
the glory of Paradise.

(Jeffers 1988, 200-204)















